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AUTHOR Crane, Terese A.
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ABSTRACT

All research on curriculum development incorporates implicit assumptions about the nature of persons and the nature of learning. These assumptions fall into two major categories: (1) psychological assumptions, based on empirical descriptions; and (2) logical (conceptual) assumptions, which give explanatory accounts of meaning. Most curriculum theory has depended on the empirical assumption that human behaviors are predictable because they are observable, and that students are "learners." This assumption leads to a curriculum development focused on training people to act in certain ways. In today's increasingly complex, multicultural society, however, curriculum developed for "learners" becomes insignificant at levels beyond training in basic processes. Conceptual curriculum theorizing recognizes students as "persons": human beings with freedom, value, and dignity. Curriculum grounded in the concept of "person" is flexible, humanizing, and able to account for unanticipated learning outcomes. Effective curriculum development can use the strengths of both types of assumptions by working from a logical or conceptual assumption about "persons," delineating necessary conditions of that concept, employing existent curricula, and evaluating them for necessary conditions as well as "learner" behaviors related to the subject matter, discipline, or conceptual base. (IW)

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'Person' in Curriculum

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Terese A. Crane
L.A. Unified School District, Calif.
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'Person' in Curriculum

Educational research emcompasses a wide spectrum of categories and concepts. One area in which researchers focus is that of 'curriculum'. Some researchers in this area concentrate on the practical applications of a particular curriculum to a certain age cohort or school. Other scholars are concerned with applications of theory to practice. Still others generate additional theory to be ultimately tested and applied.

Throughout all of these various types of research mentioned, and other types not included, assumptions are made. These implicit assumptions concern the nature of persons and the nature of learning. The assumptions are not dependent upon a particular concentration of research, rather, all types of researchers make assumptions. That is, underlying all claims of what curriculum is, does, might or should be, are a number of assumptions about how persons learn and what it is they should learn as well as that persons can and should learn something. In most cases, persons are assumed to share common attributes. Those not possessing these attributes are considered to be special cases.

Two major classes of assumptions regarding the nature of persons and the nature of learning can be distinguished. The first classification involves assumptions based on empirical descriptions. These types of claims are psychological assumptions.[1] The second type are logical statements which purport to provide

explanatory accounts of meaning. (Scheffler, 1974). These types of claims are also called conceptual claims.

Most psychological assumptions are a kind of empirical generalization. In psychological assumptions, the idea is that persons act or have the capacity to act in certain ways because persons have been observed to act like that at some prior time. The observed behavior stands as an empirical description of the assumption. This sort of assumption may be the result of inductive reasoning in which particular cases are generalized in assumptions about all persons.

In order to complete an empirical description, there must be an observable behavior associated with the concept. For example, persons can be said to learn because they are seen memorizing facts by repeating them over and over, and can recite these facts when directed to do so. The behavior (action) is the center of the psychological assumption which is based on empirical claims. Psychological assumptions, therefore, result in operational definitions (definitions based on observable characteristics of that which is being defined).[2]

Another type of assumption is based on conceptual claims. These assumptions are different from empirical or psychological assumptions in several ways. First, the assumption is not grounded only in empirical claims (e.g. a 'learner' is one who demonstrates a change in behavior which is taken to be 'learning'). Next, the assumption may relate to another concept that is not empirically defined (e.g. 'intelligence' is the ability to be

wise). Finally, the assumption is not rooted to an empirical generalization (e.g., persons a,b,c...z are observed to 'learn', therefore all persons are 'learners').

Conceptual assumptions appeal to the nature of something, to the meaning of what that thing is. Thus conceptual assumptions are formed about the essence of a concept, about what it surely means to be that thing or count for that thing.

When making a conceptual claim, an assertion is made similar to the truth that bachelors are never married men. To claim that one is a bachelor is to assert, logically, that he is a man and he is never-married. That is, certain meanings follow from how a thing is conceptualized.

Conceptualizing is, however, more than just stipulating a definition. Rather, it is a process of understanding the meaning of an idea or concept. In the process of conceptualizing, one uses the tools of language to clarify what the essence of an idea is. By using the tools of language and logic, a definition may emerge, but this definition is a basis for understanding, it is not the end of conceptualizing. Rather, understanding is the goal.

Behavior (observable and ultimately explainable) is the focus of psychologists. A psychological claim is that empirical data can be collected that 'learning' takes place. Claims such as this are tied to much (most) of curriculum theorizing and building. This dominant theme in curriculum has an historical basis.

Even the early philosophers (e.g. Plato, Aristotle, Socrates) found argument in the nature of the world. Empiricists and rationalists clashed over what is 'real'--some holding only that which is observable is 'real', others maintaining there truly existed other phenomena outside the observable. Through the centuries, conventional thought has relied on phenomena observable as more 'real' than on those phenomena that could not be sensed. At least, it is more 'comfortable' to follow empirical arguments.

When psychology formally began as a science, it seemed natural to attempt to categorize behavior in conventional ways (observable). Besides, the dominant characteristic of a science was replicability of experiments. Psychology wanted to be a 'science'.

Educational psychology began as a branch of psychology. Edward L. Thorndike (1932), wanting to maintain the 'science' image,as well as following his training, relied on observable phenomena as indication that learning took place. So too did educational psychologists coming after Thorndike (e.g. Koffka, 1935; Guthrie, 1952; Piaget, 1952; Skinner, 1953; Ausubel, 1968; Bruner, 1977). Each of these educational psychologists developed theories based on empirical assumptions. These theories held that learning occurred in a number of stimulus-response ways (whether from inside-the-person or without).

Educational theory followed educational psychology. There seemed to be strength in searching for and depending on certain predictable, observable human behaviors. Curriculum theory

followed educational theory and the quest for predicting and verifying human behaviors was renewed. Curriculum, tangible and existant, was to be the vehicle that demonstrated learning is observable and can be measured.

The measurement of learning, using curriculum as a stimulus, is assumed possible because of the underlying claim that 'learners' are those who experience a curriculum. When 'learner' meets curriculum, the change in the learner (so the argument goes) is 'learning'.

Many traditional curriculum models (e.g. Taba, Tyler) follow the line from psychology to educational psychology to curriculum theory to practice. These models predominate the curriculum field. Each claims that persons are learners (those who display certain behaviors) and by doing "x" to the learner, "y" will result. The limitation of this model is the limit of empirical generalization. Persons are more than empirical generalizations, they are more than "simply a disembodied intellect or repository of cognitive processes."[3] Traditionally, curriculum theory has been based on the empirical assumption that persons are 'learners'. This focus is too narrow a grounding. Persons are arguably more than 'learners'.

Perhaps the traditional view of 'learner' endures because, on paper, it is relatively simple. 'Learner' is exposed to curriculum (input) and produces 'learning' (output). This is the historical "factory concept" of schooling. It seems scientific, replicable. Tests are developed to ascertain how much 'learning'

is produced. This model is 'comfortable', when it does demonstrate anticipated outcomes.

Another reason the traditional model predominates may be that it delimits the mission of schools. Instead of having multi-purposes, a school may follow traditional curricula based on empirical assumptions and be concerned only with anticipated learning outcomes (read test scores). This reason does seem fallacious, however, because even though this may be a serious concern of schools and their districts for funding purposes, there are few teachers concerned only with 'learners'. That is, in some sense, traditional models delimit the purpose of schools, but practically speaking, most educators believe in the humanness of students.

From this basis, the practical knowledge that teachers daily interact with fellow human beings and not just 'learners', comes the assertion that to base curriculum on any other focus than 'person' is to be too simplistic and narrow-minded. This claim is conceptual in nature and not informed by empirical generalizations. It is an attempt to build theory from the inside out (conceptualization), rather than the traditional outside, in (observation of norms).

Assuming that persons are 'learners' (those who exhibit certain learning behaviors) has at least two implications for curriculum development. The first has to do with the subject matter to be included in a curriculum, the second regards how that curriculum should be developed for application.

When a human being is assumed to be a 'learner', the question becomes, "What should he learn?" The term 'learner', then is one of control. Heubner notes that "curricular language seems rather ludicrous when the complexity and mystery of a fellow human being is encompassed in that term."[4]

Because 'learner' is a term of curricular control, the veracity of Bernstein (1975) and Spring's (1978) arguments that curriculum is a way of limiting available knowledge to particular groups of people is acknowledged. Their arguments center on the belief that curriculum extends and enhances classes in a society. It is a means of social control. If curriculum has its basis in an assumption of 'learner' and if 'learner' should learn "x", then it may be true that this class theory is indeed possible. This is an area in need of further exploration, particularly as it effects the non-dominant (minority) group in a society.

Another implication for curriculum development following from the psychological assumption that persons are 'learners' is that how a curriculum should be developed is based on a particular learning theory. That is, if a person is assumed to be 'learner' because he has been observed to learn by doing, then a curriculum must include opportunities to learn by doing. If a person is assumed to be 'learner' in that he is only capable of learning "x" at a particular stage, then that curriculum must include "x". The idea that person is 'learner' certainly narrows the scope of curriculum practice in the classroom.

If it is true that every person learns in the same way, then

it would be logical to base curriculum on the empirical generalizations of learning theory. However, an empirical observation confirms that not every person 'learns' in the same way. Thus grounding curriculum theorizing in such a narrow perspective becomes problematic in practice. That is, if learning style is the basis of curriculum development, then there would have to be as many methods suggested in a curriculum for interpretation in the classroom as there are learning styles. This is not generally a given in curriculum. Therefore, there may need to be as many curricula in a classroom as there are learning styles. When this happens, it is a case of the tail wagging the dog. Curriculum should encompass learning styles, not be dependent on them.

It seems that by grounding curriculum in 'learner' and anticipating outcomes and attempting to control individuals through manipulating curriculum and testing for specific knowledge or understanding, that what curriculum is really about is not 'learning' in the long run, but rather 'training'. When persons are assumed to be 'learners' a curriculum development focuses on training individuals to act and react in certain ways. Those persons who react in anticipated ways are "rewarded" with high test scores, good grades, or some other kind of tangible asset. Education and schooling with this assumption is truly about training.

Of course, 'training' is at times necessary. Through drill and practice persons must learn to read (encode, decode), do basic

math, learn to write. Each of these basics is a skill achieved through training. When educators really mean to 'train', curriculum developed on 'learner', with the stipulation that 'learners' are human beings who are being trained in certain skills, is appropriate. However, 'training' is a small part of schooling, yet all curriculum is developed with focus on 'learner'. This should not be. Curriculum is a systematic organization of methods, concepts or processes involved with knowing, not merely 'training'.

If person is assumed to be 'learner' because persons learn things, how can a distinction be made between 'learners'. For, in some sense, animals can 'learn' things. And, Max Black explains, "in calling human beings persons, we are rightly ascribing to them important properties that cannot even in principle apply to other animals or animate beings."[5] To conceive of persons as 'learners' only and to base curriculum theorizing on this notion only just seems too restrictive. Curriculum theorizing should be based on the idea that human beings as persons are relevant to curriculum in schools.

In stating that 'person' be considered in curriculum theorizing, a caveat is also given. There will, no doubt, be discussion about was is meant by 'person'. But this ongoing controversial argument (concerning philosophers, scientists and theologians) should not detract from the position that 'learner' is not synonymous with 'person'. As Scheffler concludes, "there are an indefinite number of alternative definitions of 'man', indefinitely many ways of dimensionalizing his structure and capacities, all equally accurate."[6]

The conceptual claim that 'person' has curricular relevance is different from the notion that 'learner' has that relevance. The concept of 'person' for curriculum theorizing rather than 'learner' is realistic, can account for a curriculum's unanticipated outcomes, affords more dignity to human beings in schools (e.g is more humanizing) and is not tied to a particular learning theory (therefore strengthening the empirical position that there are many learning styles).

When a teacher encounters a group of students in a classroom and begins to orchestrate a curriculum, the teacher knows that she stands amongst a group of human beings. While the group may be classified as third graders or seniors, the teacher quickly realizes that each person in the group has distinct personality characteristics making each person different from the next. If she thought about these persons in abstraction before as 'learners', she now realizes that while their common goal may be to learn something, they are not devoid of human characteristics which both enhance and detract from the ability or desire to learn some thing. The teacher now is presented with a challenge.

The teacher is further cognizant of her role in developing curriculum. She must somehow motivate each person to experience the intended, explicit curriculum in a meaningful manner. She hopes her skill as a motivator and guide will lead each person to embrace the particular knowledge that the curriculum contains (as in mathematical facts or decoding in reading, for example) or an understanding of the concepts the curriculum develops (as in

social studies, for instance). However, she realizes she is interacting with 'persons'(with different psychological characteristics, feelings, backgrounds and so forth) and not only with 'learners'. To interact with 'learners' devoid of personhood would be to interact with computer-like individuals. This is not the reality in the classroom.

After vacation, most 'persons' in the classroom display tired behaviors. Sometimes 'persons' are so excited at seeing other 'persons' that their concentration level is only operative in communication with that other person. Sometimes 'persons' don't physically feel like exhibiting learning behaviors. Sometimes 'persons' don't psychologically feel like exhibiting learning behaviors. Sometimes environmental distractions prevent learning behaviors. All of these examples are merely excuses if the assumption is that a classroom is filled with 'learners'. For 'learners' learn. 'Learners' are not subject to tiredness, excitement, distractions or other influences. 'Learners' learn, the argument goes, and if a curriculum does not lead to intended learning outcomes it must be replaced, or at least the teacher should. This is wrongheaded.

Instead, the examples above are not merely excuses for the non-production of intended outcomes of a curriculum. They are the reality of why persons experiencing a curriculum do not relate to that curriculum in a meaningful way. If curriculum is based on 'person' expectations differ. Perhaps 'persons' find different meaning in a curriculum than the knowledge or understanding that

is intended. Tests determine knowledge or understanding of a process, they do not measure the meaning of the curriculum. Basing curriculum on 'person' rather than 'learner' can account for some unanticipated learning outcomes.

Besides being more consistent with practice and accounting for unanticipated learning outcomes, curriculum grounded in the concept of 'person' is more humanizing. With 'learner'(a controlling term) as central to curriculum development, the belief that human beings as persons who are free to choose is denied. By calling a human being 'learner' that being is equated to a reactive organism (input--->output). Persons are more than reactive organisms stimulated to respond in varying ways. Instead, each person as a human being has freedom, value, worth, dignity and integrity. To base a curriculum on 'person' is to recognize these characteristics regarding human beings and so not to confuse 'learning' with 'training' (a stimulus-response activity in which organisms other than humans can be engaged).

Finally, curriculum based on the concept of 'person' is not dependent on a particular learning style or idea of what constitutes a 'learner' (other than that he 'learns'). Rather, beçause each person is assumed to be unique in that his experiences and creation of meaning is unique, the empirical generalization that there are many learning styles is accepted. Thus curriculum does not flow from the empirical assumption that persons are learners, that learners behave in a particular way and that learning is produced. Instead, curriculum flows from the assumption

that human beings are 'persons', that persons possess varied characteristics, one of which is the ability to learn, and that given the individually correct exposure, a person will create meaning in some way. That meaning may be 'learning'.

As curriculum development logically follows from an assumption that human beings are 'learners', so too does curriculum development follow from an assumption that 'person' has curricular relevance. Since, in practical use, the term 'curriculum' most often refers to a course of study in a school, that is the way 'curriculum' will be used to demonstrate the practical application of 'person' as the basis of curriculum. And, since there are already so many existant subject matter curricula, it would seem prudent to show how the notion of 'person' could be used with these curricula. Of course, new curricula entirely developed with a grounding in 'person' would be welcomed.

The first task in curriculum building based on 'person' would be to assert a logical assumption concerning humanness (e.g. persons are 'creative'). Logical assumptions are derived from the purported meaning of the concept (i.e. what it means to be 'person). Then, the concept in the logical assumption (e.g. 'creative') must be analyzed for its meaning (conceptual analysis) to determine its essential features. The analysis should be from the literature to ascertain common usage. If no common usage is found, a stipulative definition of the essential features of the concept may be formulated. Next, an orientation for the curriculum should be chosen. This orientation could have a subject

matter base (e.g. Science, Math), a discipline base (e.g. reading, writing) or a concept development base (e.g. cooperativeness, citizenship). A curriculum outline should then be developed from one of these orientations with instructional strategies that include the essential or necessary features of the concept. These instructional strategies should be flexible to account for various learning styles and ways of knowing and making meaning of an experience. Once developed, the curriculum is ready to be experienced.

The evaluation of such a curriculum may include summative elements, but only after an evaluation which is primarily concerned that the essential features of that concept (e.g. 'creative') were included and presented and experienced. That is, without the inclusion of the essential features of the concept, the curriculum can be evaluated as <u>not</u> being the curriculum it was intended to be (e.g. that based on persons are 'creative'). The evaluation, therefore, is conceptual and theoretical, not only empirical, or only empirical after the conceptual work is done.

The classroom teacher is free to modify suggested instructional strategies in ways that are best suited to her teaching style and to her perception of the acceptance of persons in her class. This modification, however, must include the essential features of the concept.

The most difficult unit of developing curriculum in this fashion, or at least the most ~~time~~ consuming, is to analyze the

conceptual assumption. This is so because this part involves a literature search and communicating exactly what are the essential features of the concept. This task should primarily fall to the curriculum developers who must clarify to all who will use the curriculum exactly what the curriculum is about. This exercise in communication is extremely important because on it turns the validity of the curriculum.

Basing curriculum on 'person' ideally should follow a newly developed curriculum based on a conceptual assumption. However, what is more practical will also address the problems inherent in basing all curriculum on 'learner'. That is, curriculum developing can use the strengths of both types of assumptions by working from a logical or conceptual assumption about 'person', delineating necessary conditions of that concept, employing existant curricula for subject matter, discipline or concept base, and evaluating the curriculum for necessary conditions as well as 'learner' behaviors related to the subject matter, discipline or concept base.

Curriculum theorizing and development has traditionally been grounded in a psychological assumption that persons are 'learners'--those who react with certain learning behaviors. If education and schooling are to be about training persons to act or react in particular ways, then the traditional way to delimit the knowledge that schools are concerned with is appropriate. 'Learners' learn. 'Learners' should know "x". Schools will develop curriculum so 'learners' will learn "x". 'Learners' is a term of control in curricular language. At times, this term

of control seems appropriate to train individuals in certain processes.

However, all curricula have traditionally been grounded in this assumption. This has lead to major objections and confusion about what curriculum or schooling is or should be. The objections, as is this one, have been based on language--not only on a word, but on the meaning inherant in the word. 'Learner' is controlling, constricting. 'Person' is delimiting and leads to many possibilities. The major objection to the term 'learner' is that it does not ascribe a uniqueness to a human being that is undeniably present, to a greater or lesser degree, when that human being first encounters formal schooling (or regardless if he ever encounters formal schooling). That is, 'persons' are a group of beings with many attributes, not the least of which is that they both effect and are effected by experience. Since no two persons have identical experiences (and, of course this includes the argument about perceptions of experiences), then these 'persons' are unique. To say that education and schooling is other than training, there must be curricula based on human beings as 'persons' (with all of their capabilities and uniquenesses).

It can be argued that both the notion of 'learner' and of 'person' have curricular relevance. When to use each concept as a basis for developing curriculum must be further debated. More energy must be given to the theory and practice based on the conceptual claim of 'person' at this time, however, if both ideas

are to coexist on any essentially equal basis. In other words, scholars must closely examine the notion that 'person' has curricular relevance at this time, rather than continue to rely on the psychological assumption of 'learner' if needed change is to occur.

There may have been an historical basis for grounding curriculum theory and practice in the controlling term 'learner' when knowledge was more limited and the cultural diversity inherent in many large school districts now was non-existant. However, the reality is that knowledge is no longer so contained (that is, the known is expanding at a rapid rate) and large school systems are increasing in many cultural minority groups. Curriculum developed for 'learners' becomes increasingly insignificant at levels beyond being trained in various basic processes (e.g. how to read, how to write, how to do math). 'Learners' are not producing anticipated outcomes. And if any curriculum is to be global in nature, how can it be if it is so constrictive, controlling and perhaps insignificant or inhibiting to any other culture besides that for which it was designed?

Curriculum based on the conceptual assumption of 'person' can be more flexible. While the 'learner' must learn, a 'person' is. A number of conceptual or psychological assumptions can be made about 'person' and curriculum developed from these assumptions. This makes curriculum more flexible to all (the developer, the teacher, the persons experiencing the curriculum).

Basing curriculum on the notion of 'person' will continue to humanize persons. In the end, persons are considered as beings

who have certain abilities, not 'learners' who must produce "x" to justify a particular curriculum. The beginning and ending of curriculum is 'person' and who he is--not what he does, must do or should do. Curriculum becomes a vehicle to amplify personhood, not a means to control what a person learns or a socialization process to teach a person how he must or should act.

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1. Some psychological assumptions are based on conceptual claims (e.g. his 'self-concept' is 'good').

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